

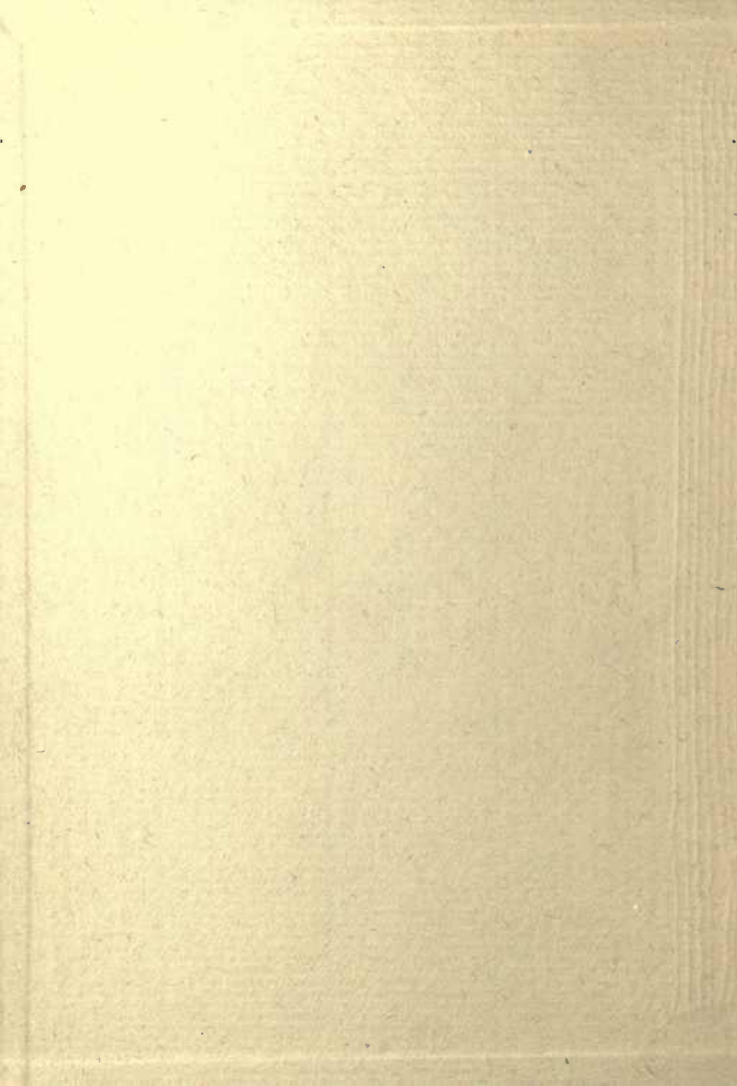
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CORRESPONDENCE
&
CONVERSATIONS
CLYDE FITCH





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Some Correspondence and Six
Conversations

Some Correspondence
and
Six Conversations

By
CLYDE FITCH



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MDCCCC

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STONE AND KIMBALL
NEW YORK

TO
MISS MINSEY

HER NAME IS COMFORT, HER NAME IS TRUE;
HER FRIENDS ADORE HER, AND I DO TOO.

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Some Correspondence

Some Correspondence

A DUOLOGUE

IN THE SHAPE OF TWO LETTERS; THE FIRST WRITTEN BY A HANDSOME, ATTRACTIVE MAN OF THE WORLD, BORN IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, IN 1859, BUT FROM CHILDHOOD A RESIDENT OF NEW YORK; THE SECOND LETTER WRITTEN IN REPLY TO THE FIRST BY A NEW YORK WOMAN, BORN *somewhere about* 1864, CHARMING, LOVELY, AND MARRIED —BUT UNHAPPILY.

NEW YORK, FEB. 25th, 1894.

O My Dear, Dear Mrs. Peggy:—

Have n't you realized why you have n't seen me these last three days? It is because I have seen no one and nothing but *you!* There, it is out! And unless your woman's instinct

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has been very much "a-maying" (I could n't say "wool gathering" apropos of it) you must have seen and known days, weeks ago.

I've tried to go away. I've chosen ever so many routes, gone several times to the station, and twice even bought a ticket; but while what we poor fools call our better judgment dragged my very mortal body away from town, my heart full of love, and heavy because I feel you will say for you to receive—or any rate to return that love, would be wrong,—my heart (and God bless it!) held me back fast, in the place where *you* see the sun shine, and the moon rise. Can you make head or tail of me, my darling Mrs. Peggy? which of course I mustn't call you unless you grant me permission to; will you?

But to go back not further than yes-

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terday, I had been only two days away from you, yet having sworn to myself the night before that I would n't go to see you in the morning, I found I could n't go to sleep at all, because I had nothing to wake up for. And then what a day! As if it were n't enough to have you in my heart, I had you "on the brain," too. Everywhere I went I saw only Mrs. Peggy, and myriads of her! Think of myriads of Mrs. Peggys, when there is really only one in the whole wide world, only could be one, and she besides is more than two-thirds heavenly. When I boarded a street-car it seemed to me that Mrs. Peggy rang the bell and inside there were rows and rows of her, and every strap had another man than me hanging on it all down the aisle. Even at lunch, she was with me, the *Carte du Jour* was à

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

la Peggy. And all my business letters were signed with her name big and vanishing. Every store I passed on Broadway belonged to you, and Sarony had no one else pictured in his windows. The violets the men sold on 23d street smiled like your eyes, and lily-of-the-valley tears hung sympathetically for me beside them. I could n't stand it any longer! I glanced up at the Fifth Avenue Hotel clock, — it was Mrs. Peggy minutes past Mrs. Peggy! and I came on here to my Club to make a fool or a beast or what? — of myself. I have n't even been able apparently to make my declaration seriously! That is because of two reasons; first, I did n't want to frighten you, or anger you, or have you laugh at me, either, I thought it was safer to invite you to laugh *with* me; and second, I was afraid you

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

might be less likely to believe a serious declaration from me, we have always been on such jolly, joky terms, you and I (I love even to write those three words, together, and I would like to join them with an everlasting adamantine little chain of hearts, which I am afraid is woefully silly for a great strong man who once had a beard, to say). Perhaps you will be angry with this letter anyway, but I have honestly tried to take as few liberties as possible, and though some of the adjectives are a trifle more cordial than usual, still I continue calling you "Mrs.," even when I have to put it in afterward with a caret for a witness! But I shall stop all that—yes, I must; it is all too trivial. Besides, it is beating around the bush. I would rather beat against the bars. The facts are these—you

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

are not happy. There is no love lost—ever to be found, between you and your husband; this I dare to write because you have confessed as much to me. Why then should n't I at least tell you that *I do love you*,—it is a necessity for me to say it, or I shall go mad with its being hushed so long into silence, while I see you starving of any love, if not for mine. And God help me, but I can't help hoping, thinking, dreaming, or what you choose to call it, that my step coming has been a pleasant sound to your ears, my hand's clasp welcome to your hand, my glances answered in your deep sea eyes. *I love you*, and that's why I have n't been to see you! The last time I called I could scarcely keep my lips from seeking yours, and I long ago gave up trying to keep my thoughts from that; when you

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came into the rooms, the flowing drapery of your sleeve brushed against me, — it affected me like an exquisite sweep of harp strings, it was as if an unseen paradise wing had blessed me, and for a moment I was quite dizzy. Perhaps you will remember how distracted I was the whole afternoon. I recall two times that you withdrew your darling little slippers farther back under your skirt, catching my satyr eye upon them. This is only a silly detail, but I mean by it, — I *had* to stay away those three days for which you reproach me. Send me some word! Are you angry with me? Will you ever speak to me again? Or are you only disappointed with me, which would be worse! Or do you — I can't help it, I must write it, and for God's sake answer it, — *do you love me?*

JACK.

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

NOVEMBER 23d, 1894.

Dear Jack:—

No, I am not angry with you, and I will speak to you the next time you give me a *sane* chance,—and—I don't love you. (*Here there is something scratched out, which by holding to the light one can read*) I will confess that if I were not — (*there the sentence was broken and the pen run across it several times. The letter continues*) —I think now I've answered your principal questions, and I will tell you just what happened when I received your letter. First,—Dick brought it to me, young Dick I mean, four years old to-day — didn't you just a little forget him? “O,” I said, as I took the envelope, “here's a letter from Uncle Jack! Now we'll know what's become of him all this time.” “*Bully*

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

Uncle Jack!" answered Dick. (I think the adjective was one of your many presents to him.) How about that "Uncle?" do you want to throw away all right to that adopted title? and don't you want to keep the adjective too, till you're an old man, and Dickie's your age now?—Well, I opened the letter to read it, but before I had finished some one came into the room, and for the first time in my life I had a letter in my hands I was ashamed of, and wished to hide. As soon as I was alone, I read it over again, and tried to laugh and think it was a joke, and almost looked for a calendar to see if it wasn't somehow or other, the first of April. Then I had a cup of tea, sent word I was to be denied to everybody, and read your letter for the third time. Then I did laugh honestly, but cried

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

too, and having finished with a satisfactory fit of hysterics, I felt better, and cleared out and rearranged my dressing-table drawers. Then I began to answer you, and this is the sixth letter I've started to write. I don't know if I shall send this or not, which is silly of me to say, for, of course, if you don't get it, you'll know I didn't.

The trouble is every one of the five others were all lies, and this began with a lie too, and *now* I'm going to take it back! I can't help what I've already written, I'm going to tell you the truth now.

Jack, I *do* love you. But *don't stop here*, be sure you finish this letter. Yes, I *do* love you, God help me! (not God *forgive* me, I do not ask him to *forgive* me. He knows that I haven't grown to love you of my own accord, that it's

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

been in spite of myself, that I've tried with all my strength of will not to love you. How is it, I wonder, that the only thing the *mind can't* control is the *heart*. It's true, you see evidences of it all about you. Your best friend turns around and marries the man that bored her to death in the beginning,—and O, dear,—may again in the end.)

But to go back, or rather go on with what I have to write. When Dick's father so far forgot his boy and me, as to start a second home, he killed my love for him, which had before this filled every nook and crevice of my heart. Dead, how that love shrivelled up into nothing! and as time passed on, making everything worse instead of better, I put the withered corpse out of my heart, and swept the place and closed it, and vowed I would keep it

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

empty and clean. It isn't *empty* any longer, but *you* must help me keep it *clean*. Jack, *dear* Jack, do you know what it is for a woman, a young woman who knows what love is, who has had it, and *lost* it, and has seemed to be living only under a midnight sun ever since,—suddenly to find herself warmed, inspired, glorified under the rays of a golden noonday! all, with this knowledge that her ideal still exists, if she can't attain it, that she can be loved, *is* loved, as *she* can love, *does* love in return? All I can say is, the joy is so great, it is worth bearing all the pain, the pain that must follow. Think of the loneliness of us unloved wives. For the love of husband and wife is the most precious thing in life. It is the one love that takes precedence of all others; it is the Emperor. Children leave father

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

and mother, when their little fingers grow big enough for the golden circlet; and so you see that while just now Dickie is to me the greatest comfort and joy, I cannot honestly say he fills the empty space in my heart, made for *another* love than his. In a few short years he too will find the same empty spot in his own heart and fill it with some good woman's love, I *hope*. And THEN what a loneliness for me! * * * And yet somehow it is largely the boy that keeps me,—that and *myself*. For in spite of all this loneliness (which I doubt sometimes if many *men* can imagine) and which faces me, I couldn't go away with you. I know I should always, all my life, be ashamed.

But not trusting wholly to my emotions, I have reasoned it out. I have taken up an old visiting list, and there

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

is Mrs. X——, the first name crossed out. *She* did it. Four years ago. She spends all her time traveling about Europe; one winter in Paris, another in St. Petersburg, and so on. Summers, people are always meeting her at Aix, or Homburg, or somewhere. She hurries out of their sight, dreading to have them cut her; and they say she is beautiful and thin, and haggard, and too highly colored, and always terror-stricken lest *he* get tired of her! Poor Dolly! we were roommates at school together, and she always shared everything on the *thirds* principle—you took two-thirds, she one, and she would n't have it any other way.

Farther on is another name crossed out, Laura B——. She came back here, and tried to fight it out in the Courts, and get possession of her child.

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

And the Courts decided against her ;— she's dead, *happy* Laura ! And I found a name, not crossed out, belonging to a woman I visit now, because I *won't* believe ill of her. She is one of the most unhappy women in New York, living on with her husband while the world, who whispers she deceives him, watches and counts the hours she spends with another. And I stopped to think for a moment over another name, Mrs. D——, of 52d Street, you know who I mean ; I'm not sure how much better her case is. I knew her when I was a girl too, she was married then, and seemed the happiest and most loveable woman in the world. Now she's a hard bitter one with never a kind word for anybody (only yesterday I heard she said of my sister-in-law, that she tried so hard to get into society, you could

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

hear her climb!) Mrs. D. has made two loveless marriages for her daughters, who might have been unusually charming women, but now are only conventional ones; and for twenty years she has sat opposite her husband at the table, gone out with him, lived in his house, entertained his friends, and never spoken one word to him. That must be awful.

I want none of these sort of lives, Jack. I must make something of mine, but I must have some love, too, some happiness, some pleasure in it. I feel if only we could be *just honest* friends! *If ONLY!* Can we? *Can't* we?

I know some good, happy women who look like saints, whose husbands are devils, and other women whose husbands are devils and their wives *she* ones, and they look it. We always

SOME CORRESPONDENCE

look what we are, no amount of mental cosmetics can keep it out of our faces. Help me to *look* happy and good. (If it's only appearances, you know they are a great comfort to women!)

Come and see me soon, just as soon as I may have absolute trust in you, and you have it in yourself. I wonder if I am asking for an Ibsen miracle!

PEGGY.

She folded it, re-read it, sealed it, and addressed it. Then she tore it into a hundred pieces, and there was no answer.

Two Letters and Two Tele-
grams.

Two Letters and Two Telegrams.

- I. LETTER FROM BENTON FOSDICK,
ESQ., OF NEW YORK, TO THOMAS
PLANKTON, ESQ., OF ALBANY.
APRIL 2d.

My Dear Old Tom:—A very momentous question — that's what I'm going to ask you, and I want you to go into a corner of the club, quite by yourself, with a good big cigar, and do n't dismiss the subject from your mind till the cigar's finished. Do it for the sake of our old college chumship.

There's a girl I want to marry, at least I think I do, in fact I know I do.

TWO LETTERS AND

Shall I? That's the question. Of course I love her, or I couldn't feel this way, could I? She's young, very young, always talking about her birthday — has just had it, I mean, or it is just going to be — something of that sort. She's beautiful; the kind of hair I like: She doesn't dress it in the fashion, and yet it never seems out; there's no William Tell effect on top, or a bath bun or bustle at the back, or Dolly Vardens at the side, it's just coiled away somehow, somewhere, sort of parted in front, and half way wavy, without being crimpy or fancy, and is darkish — you know the kind I mean. Lovely eyes, and all the rest of it; splendid figure; hand full of character, and awfully pretty Trilbys. Her father's very rich and only has one other child, so altho' she has nothing of

TWO TELEGRAMS

her own, financially it's a chance most any fellow would be glad to speculate on. I only mention this to show you that I have n't completely lost my head; of course the money does n't make any difference to me, but I want you to understand that I'm not altogether impracticable.

Her position in society is all right, better than mine, and her mother is always on the go, balls and parties and smaller things for *derniers resorts*, so she'd never be a bother.

Then the girl herself has a mind. Is tremendously interesting and original in all her conversation. Really I often ask her advice about serious things, and take it besides, and always find I am right. She knows about art, and music, and is all around cultivated. The sort of girl you'd be deuced proud of any-

TWO LETTERS AND

where. And what I feel particularly about her is that she would take such a great interest in me and my work. She'd be a constant stimulant; she would adopt all my views, ideas, and ambitions; she would lose her own self in me, devote herself to my work, and her life be absorbed in mine! I would accomplish twice what I do now. She could do all the tedious mechanical work that takes so much time I might be giving to other things. She could help me in a thousand ways. She'd always be on hand to protect me from the hundred and one sacrifices that come daily kicking one to take notice of them.

May be my love blinds me, but I feel she has a beautiful character fully capable of doing all this for me. It seems to me it's a chance in a life time that I ought n't to let slip by. And

TWO TELEGRAMS

yet it's an irretrievable sort of thing, this marriage. I don't want to go into it too hastily, and perhaps find I'd made a mistake after all and ruined my career instead of aiding it. So I come to you, remembering the old talks about marriage over the midnight wood-fire that lasted almost till we heard the chapel bell for prayers.

You were always falling in love; I never. You ought to understand the business better than I. (I heard, too, you almost ruined yourself a couple of years ago for a worthless girl, and nothing teaches like experience.) Think it out carefully, and send me word, shall I marry her?

Yours always sincerely,

BENTON FOSDICK.

P. S.—I shall only wait a day to hear from you.

TWO LETTERS AND

II. TELEGRAM FROM THOMAS PLANKTON, ESQ., OF ALBANY, TO BENTON FOSDICK, ESQ., OF NEW YORK, APRIL 3d.

“In God’s name, for the sake of the girl; DO N’T. TOM.”

TWO TELEGRAMS

III. LETTER FROM MISS BEATRICE HAUTON, OF NEW YORK, TO BENTON FOSDICK, ESQ., OF NEW YORK, APRIL 4TH.

Dear Mr. Fosdick:—I am very sorry. I trust I have n't been unconsciously flirting with you, for to be honest, while I enjoy enormously having you take me in to dinner, I could n't for one moment think of sitting opposite to you at the breakfast table! I thank you sincerely for the honor you pay me, but I cannot be your wife.

Sincerely your friend,

BEATRICE HAUTON.

TWO TELEGRAMS

IV. TELEGRAM FROM BENTON FOS-
DICK, ESQ., OF NEW YORK, TO
THOMAS PLANKTON, ESQ., OF AL-
BANY, APRIL 5TH.

“Thanks, old man. Have taken
your advice. B. F.”

The Seven Daily Letters of a
Sea Voyage.

The Seven Daily Letters of a Sea Voyage.

WEDNESDAY.

My Darling :

It nearly broke my heart to leave you on the dock a few moments ago, and see the water tumbling between us. I had one of those impulses to throw myself overboard, as one sometimes has to pitch oneself under the wheels of a train. But in two months I will be back, and mamma probably entirely well, and ten days after I shall meet you (unless you do not turn up) at the chancel railing of St. James, with Bess to hold my bouquet by my side, and Harold to hold mamma in the front

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

pew ; for mamma, bless her heart, is sure to misbehave herself in some hysterical way.

Should you fail to put in an appearance, I would never leave the church. I would stand there waiting for you till I could stand no longer, and then I would lie on the chancel steps till I died, waiting for you. Because I know you would come unless you yourself were no longer living, and if you were dead, I would rather meet your spirit there in St. James' chancel, and our souls would wed before we drifted away to where they say no weddings are. (How *can* it be heaven without !!)

But, O dear, I do n't want to be sad in this letter, and besides I know what you think — that you'll be in the church half an hour before the time set for the ceremony, and that I am sure in

OF A SEA VOYAGE

your opinion will be at the least three-quarters of an hour before I begin to think of arriving ! We are just passing Miss Liberty (what a dreadful young person, staying out all night the way she does — *there's* a “new woman” for you !) and I am scratching away to send this back by the pilot boat. Will they suspect, do you think, that Cupid's in the mail-bag ? I hope he won't play any pranks with the pilot, especially if there is a wife at home. I'm beginning already to have very severe ideas about a married man !

I want you to know that I am going to write you every single day at sea, so I shall send you seven long letters all at once when the voyage is over ! Each letter will be numbered, and have its day of the week written at the top, and you can “take one every morning” till my

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

next epistle arrives. Is n't that a good idea! It will make up for the long time you have to wait without a word from me. I am quite in earnest. I shall date the seven sheets to-night and give you my promise (doing that 'll become a habit if I am not careful) you shall have them all.

I know I shall not be ill on the voyage. I'm used to the water — you know I was born on the banks of the Connecticut river. It's a lovely day, and as for motion I don't feel the slightest bit. If only YOU were on board I should n't feel anything but gladness in the sunshine, and the air, and the doing-nothingness. Mamma is already rolled up in her chair on deck, looking like a guy, and asking everybody from the sailors to the captain, *via* the stewards and stokers, if we shall

OF A SEA VOYAGE

get in Tuesday night or Wednesday morning.

Goodbye, my love. They want the letters that are to go back. No one is looking — and that little cross there — you understand! I know I am silly, but really when one is in love what is one to do? The great, deep, indescribable, blessed, infinite something, which makes all life different, and which we call *love*, we can't express that! We have to try and satisfy ourselves by dwelling on the external trifles, and so we seem silly, perhaps. I add that "perhaps" because I don't want you to be afraid to be "silly" when you write to me! It is just as most of us can describe people's clothes better than their souls. We are forced to speak of the flounces (embraces), jewels (kisses), robes (the holding of

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

hands), of love, because —— good gracious I shall miss the mail bag — the man's waiting for me to finish. Goodbye — repeat in your next letter *every word* you've said to me the last three weeks — if you leave out one single word I shall think that one you did n't mean. If you find this page wet, it is tears, or kisses, you can take your choice — or both. Thine,

MARION.

OF A SEA VOYAGE

No. I.

THURSDAY.

My * * * * : As I wrote you, I have placed the day for seven days at the top of a sheet of paper (not that I shall limit myself to one sheet, O dear no!) and repeat my promise sent you by the pilot boat yesterday, you shall have all seven!

This is the second day out. They say it is very smooth, and I suppose it is, but I find it rather wobbly; not that I am ill, I don't mean that. I am perfectly well, only awfully *homesick* for you. Mamma is in her first and most distressing stage. She is never going back, if she lives to reach England, and all she will say, when I go to her state-room, is, "Please go away!" So I do.

There is the usual crowd on board.

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

All sorts and conditions of people, and the worst, of course, are seated next to us at table. The woman wears fancy worsted articles on her head and feet. Mamma, who has talked to her, says I am too critical, and that her heart is in the right place, but I still can't help wishing her head and feet were equally well situated. She is learning French on board with a dictionary and Baedeker, and hopes to be personally conducted to Egypt before she returns. Her husband is with her, but he never shows. Our other table companions are some English people, who dress for dinner, and own the whole ship, excluding the captain. There are no young men on board, at least I've not seen any, except you. The moment a pair of trousers see-saws into view, at the other end of the ship when I'm walking, it has your

OF A SEA VOYAGE

head and shoulders on — a rather dangerous phantasy. I tremble sometimes to think what if my imagination should go too far.

We saw a whale to-day (I wish to tell you all the news), and three gulls that swung past us this afternoon have very loving messages for you from me. To be sure the whale was better capable of holding the quantity of love I wished to send you, but I was afraid he would spout too much nonsense, so I chose the gulls.

(There is at this moment a female creature in the opposite room playing light music very heavily on the poor piano. I imagine she either doesn't know flats and sharps when she sees them, or else she's hurt their feelings so often they cut her dead on their own account when they meet.)

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

— Mamma just sent for me to come quickly. I rushed to her thro' the labyrinthine halls, up and down the unstable spiral staircases, — and found she wanted to know what o'clock it was, and to tell me, with tears rolling out of her eyes, she could never, never go home again, and that I must be reconciled to being married without her, unless you and father will come over to England. She wishes to live hereafter in the highest mountains as far as possible from the sea, from the sight or the smell of it! The suggestion of water she receives with disgust, and has eschewed salt on account of its painful associations, speaking with what she laboriously declares is her dying breath. But adds a little *inaproposly* that for the long remainder of her life, all food to reach her lips must go thither

OF A SEA VOYAGE

unseasoned. That seems to me unfair to pepper, but I suppose it suffers in the way of a poor relation. Dear mamma, I really do feel so sorry but one can't do anything for her. Nothing offends her more than the suggestion that she will ever be better.

Dear old darling Tom*

* * * *

Thank heaven! the lady pianist has suddenly stopped. It is getting much rougher outside, so perhaps she is fortunately ill, only I am afraid if she can stand her own playing the sea won't have much effect upon her. O dear, it *is* getting very, very rough, and I am so blue. Of course I know you do love

*The author has taken the liberty of leaving out several lines here and there in the letters, after reading them himself, lines of a certain personal and tender interest to the two correspondents, but hardly to be given to the public at large.

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

me, but I must wait so long before I hear you say so again. Somehow or other I feel like crying.

I hate the ocean, dearest, because it separates us, and my head aches awfully besides. People are rushing all over the place, I wish they wouldn't. It's getting rougher and rougher. I have to hold on to the table with my hand while I write. I think people make themselves much worse by not keeping still. Now I keep still, and am perfectly well. I mean I am not seasick, but I think I have caught a slight cold, or something, that's all. I long for you, dear old Tom. I think the trouble with my head is it wants somebody's shoulder to lean on! Oh! there has been such a lurch of the ship! Something has happened, everybody is talk-

OF A SEA VOYAGE

ing. A lady was hurt in the music room. I don't want to be cruel, but if any one in the music room was hurt it ought to have been — *it was!* The *lady pianist's* head was thrown against the piano, she who played the light music a little while ago. A young girl by me has just said she believes the piano did it on purpose. No one could blame the poor piano. And the lady isn't hurt seriously, only been put a little out of tune probably. Turn about is fair play!

I don't seem to have any more ideas. I will finish later. I think I'm sleepy. I feel like Alice in wonderland, and I wish the chairs and tables would behave themselves. I don't know how I shall get to my stateroom, for I don't see anything quiet to hold on by. You see

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

the ship is rolling so. O dear, I wish you were here. If it weren't for you I should wish I were dead? I don't know what's the matter with me. I will —

OF A SEA VOYAGE

No. II.

FRIDAY.

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

No. III.

SATURDAY.

OF A SEA VOYAGE

No. IV.

SUNDAY.

Dearest :

I send you my love. I am not very well. I think I must have caught a cold.

M.

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

No. V.

MONDAY.

Dearest :

We are over half way over. I am so grateful. Will you come over and marry me in England? I cannot, I cannot go back, not even to marry you. Don't think I don't love you, for I do with all my heart, and if you don't come over for me I shall never marry, that's all.

I am sitting up for the first time for three days on the deck and—but, I think, I shall go down now.

OF A SEA VOYAGE

No. VI.

TUESDAY.

Another beautiful day, and mamma has had her hair done, so she is believing in life again. We want her to come up on deck, but she says she's become so used to trying to keep everything down she doesn't want to break the charm, even with herself, just as she seems to be succeeding. She has settled on the church for our marriage in London, for you *will* come over for me *won't* you, and she has made out an imaginary list of guests present which includes all the crowned heads of Europe. She said the list saved her from going mad the other night. Every time the ship pitched she added a name, and the higher up the ship went the higher in the social scale was the wedding guest.

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

We are seeing sails to-day, and to-morrow we will land! — Mamma has just sent for me again. She is really very much better. She is in the toilet stage of seasickness. I don't know whether men have it or not, but after having her hair beautifully arranged, she has resorted to manicuring to a degree of perilous perfection, and to face massage, and now wants ammonia with which to clean her rings.

My ring needs no such care. The dust has no time to settle down between kisses. Good-bye, my best beloved, my knight with the true eyes — and the fickle mustache!

* * * *

MARION.

OF A SEA VOYAGE

No. VII.

* * * *

At last! Such sunshine! Such breezes! The air seems full of kisses, but as none of them are yours I turn up my nose instead of my lips to it. And you needn't come over to England. The ocean is perfect to-day, and I won't be married anywhere but in the chancel of St. James.

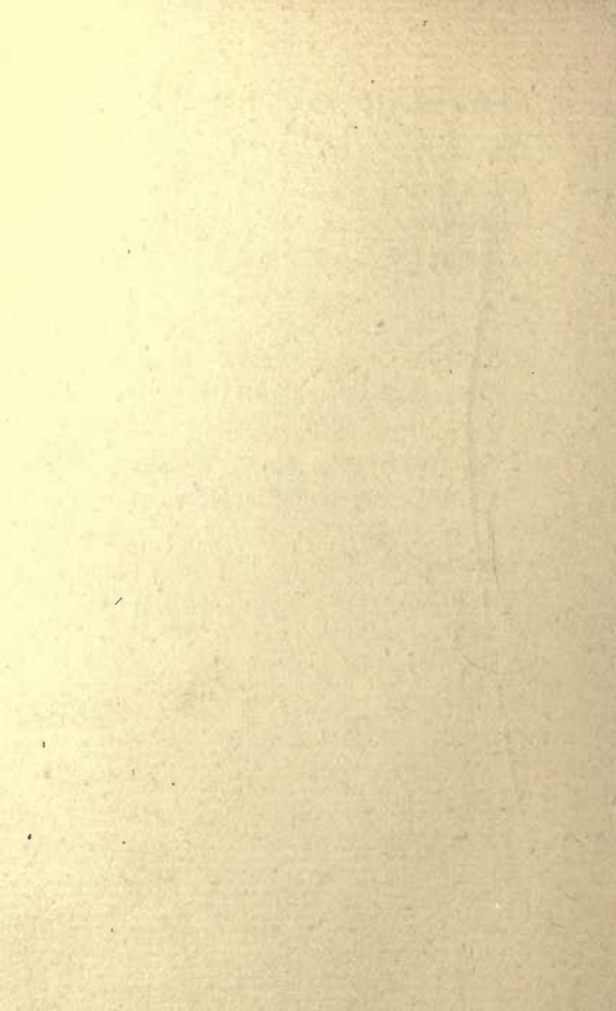
Such a new lot of people! It is like a new month at a summer hotel. Dozens of women I'd not seen before on the voyage seem to have risen like Venus (only a little paler) from the sea. And the hats and bonnets! The deck bloomed out this morning as if spring had been concealed in the hold and had crept upstairs during the night. And next we'll land! And next I shall

THE SEVEN DAILY LETTERS

have my first letter from you ! and in two months we are coming back and — but you know the whole story, don't you, as well as I. I said I would send you the seven letters, so I do ! If you are pressed for time when you get this budget skip Nos. 2 and 3. Good-bye. London will be empty without you and there won't be a soul in Paris. But in my heart and head — ah ! there will be all the world — all the world for me — *you.*

MARION.

Two Letters and a Postal
Card



Two Letters and a Postal Card

I

My Dearest Lucy:

Here is my visit to Sybil nearly over and I have n't written to you yet, but it's because I simply have n't had time. I have been doing something every moment, and whatever fault I might find, if I wished to, I must say Sybil has done her best to entertain me. She is very much altered since we were all school girls together; grown so plain (not that she ever was beautiful, was she?), but you know her mouth was very pretty. Now, I do n't know, but I suspect she has a couple of what Dickie calls "hired teeth," because

TWO LETTERS AND

the shape, or expression, of her lips has altered. Perhaps it's disappointment at not having had an offer yet, for I don't suppose she has, as she is n't married, and seems to have had no interesting experiences to tell of. Of course she always did dress like a guy, — positively I was ashamed when we went out together, and had to add a knot of ribbon collar, and a width to her sleeves, just for self-protection. I think it must have been her *mind* we admired at school, was n't it? or something of the sort, for she still says a clever thing once in a while; not exactly often, but still frequently enough to remind you of what she did once. She looks like a well-preserved woman of — say — three years older than she really is, and would n't help her looks along for anything in the world! Not that I advo-

A POSTAL CARD

cate cosmetics, as you know. I never use them at all myself, except days when I'm feeling badly, or evenings when I want especially to make an impression, for some reason or other. Then I call the use of a very little perfectly legitimate. But, dear me, what a time I have putting it on! Sybil never leaves me alone for a moment! Our rooms are together, and she dresses mostly in mine. I actually have to go into the bath room, lock the door, turn on the water, and pretend I'm taking a bath, to get a moment to myself, with my little pocket box of red and white powder! One night I could n't make that opportunity, and the family nearly bored me to death with enquiries about my health and fatigue, and wanted to give up going to a dance on my account! I shall never forget that party!

TWO LETTERS AND

I hate to visit people with families, don't you? Not that Sybil's were n't charming to me, they were perfectly lovely, and I think really enjoyed meeting me tremendously. But, my dear! think of trying to give a smart dinner party with two old maid aunts, and one under-age boy, who always insisted on being at the table! And then when we went anywhere! we were a perfect caravan and had to go in relays, or in a procession of carriages! Not that they do n't know how the thing ought really to be done. Sybil is exceedingly well born, there's no denying that, and you can tell it from the furniture and old portraits, which are perfect in style and taste, and fit in everywhere, and have n't Duveen's and Cypher's price mark on them, either. So Sybil has a very swell little trap of her own, and a

A POSTAL CARD

charming little footman, with a quite correct livery; but these things don't seem essential to her,—I believe she could get along without them. There always was something lacking in her; I used to notice it in the old days.

I am coming home the day after tomorrow. My visit is n't really up; I planned to stay two weeks, as they asked me, but I can't stand it. I said I would at first, and that's the trouble; but you see I had forgotten what these small towns are like. My *dear!* Such parties! like children's affairs! and such conversations! Every girl I've met here asked me if I don't love Trilby, and if I've seen the play, and to please tell them all about it. I told Sybil's mother I'd been twice, but the people with me had been so amusing I did n't follow much of the play. You ought

TWO LETTERS AND

to have seen her expression! It was the day she came to ask me to wear one of my other evening gowns, instead of my white satin ball dress, at the rest of their fiddle-dy-dee parties. You know my white satin, the best thing I have, and the most becoming,—the one with the shoulder-straps that do n't go over the shoulders but around the arms. Somebody or other had said it was too décollete, or something like that. Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous? Probably some girl with a scrawny neck!

The men are delightful, really so devoted, not half so careless or negligent as most New York men, and fall earnestly in love with you. But, on the other hand, they're entirely too timid,—never take the slightest liberties. However, I suppose that's more the girl's fault than theirs. It's been

A POSTAL CARD

my experience when a girl's bored by a man's not going too far with her, she has only herself to blame.

But to tell you the real purpose of this letter. What I want you to do is, to send me a telegram immediately on receipt of this, sign it mother, and say I am wanted home at once, some social engagement I cannot miss, so that Sybil will realize I can't help breaking short my visit to her. You see they've made plans for next week, so I must have a good excuse for disappointing them. Goodbye. Do n't forget to send the telegram *at once*. My *clothes* have been a *huge success*, and I've had a lovely time, but I do n't believe in wearing out one's welcome, do you? How is Harry? Still devoted?

With love and kisses,

BLANCHE.

TWO LETTERS AND

II

My Dear Lucy :

I know Blanche is writing you, and so I thought, without saying a word to her, I'd run up to my room and write you a few lines on my own account. Please don't believe one-half the nice things she's saying of us, because it's only her dear nature that makes her enjoy her visit amongst us provincials! It simply does all of us good to see how she enjoys our unconventional little pleasures, and mother and both my aunts, not to mention the rest of us, are completely won by her. I didn't know she had such adaptability, but she seems to fit right into everything, except perhaps our rather high-necked evening dresses, but even then when mother spoke to her she gave in most

A POSTAL CARD

gracefully, and we're sure she'll build a second story to the shoulder straps of her white satin gown, when she goes home. Mother says all town people want is to come in contact with country people once in a while to strike a happy medium for themselves at once. Blanche has n't changed one bit; if anything, she's grown younger. It's perfectly wonderful. She certainly is healthier than when at school, for she has splendid color, and her complexion is very much improved. This visit has shown the real woman underneath what some people who did n't know her, perhaps, would call a slightly frivolous exterior. She was so sweet just now, as she decided to write to you. She put her arms about my neck, and said she was going to write you what a perfectly lovely time she was having, and that

TWO LETTERS AND

she could live with us forever, and hoped nothing horrid would happen to cut short her visit. She had a sort of presentiment as if something might, and it would break her heart.

Now, why I go into all this is, especially, because I do n't want you to believe all she says, and think it's a paradise here, and then be disappointed, for mother joins me in begging you to come to us for a fortnight on the 20th, the day after Blanche goes home. We can give only the simplest sort of amusement but can offer you the very greatest welcome, not only from our own little family here, but from the whole *town!* Do write that you will come. Blanche has encouraged me into not letting old school friendships go the way of our dolls. They are

A POSTAL CARD

like small children in a family, when they die no new little ones that may come can take the place of the ones that are gone. So do come to us, will you? Pack up your very simplest ball dress (the *highest neck*, not the *highest price*). My two maiden aunts are both Miss Grannises', I'm afraid, and very lovable, as I don't doubt she is. Mother joins me in love and hoping to see you on the 20th.

As ever,

SYBIL.

P. S. I kept this letter over night to post, and this morning early came a telegram from Blanche's mother, — is n't it a pity! She must leave to-day. We are in an awful mix-up, because we'd accepted several invitations for the rest of the week. Little parties given

TWO LETTERS AND

especially in Blanche's honor. But of course she must not disappoint her mother. Now, won't *you* come on the day after to-morrow, instead of the 20th? *Do!*

S.

A POSTAL CARD

III

POST CARD

Dear S.: I waited to answer your letter until I saw Blanche, and now it is Sunday night, not a stamp in the house, and as this must reach you to-morrow, I hope you will excuse the post card. I'd *dearly* love to come, but I simply *can't!* It is *sweet* of you to ask me, — but Blanche says I have no dresses that would do at all. We go to Narragansett in five days for the summer. Papa has taken the most expensive cottage there. Blanche says she had an ideal time with you, and from her description I should imagine she had. It is cruel I can't come. You must pay me a visit some time, — next Lent, maybe.

Lots of love,

L.

Childhood

Childhood

(Eighteen Ninety-six.)

TWO LETTERS, THE SECOND FROM SUSIE, OF ALBANY, ÆTAT ELEVEN. A BLONDE DEMOISELLE IN A STIFF WHITE FROCK, HIGH-WAISTED, THANKS TO A BROAD PINK SASH, HAIR VELASQUEZ,—A GOLD BANGLE ON HER RIGHT WRIST.

THE FIRST LETTER FROM BEATRICE, OF NEW YORK, ÆTAT ALSO ELEVEN. A BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY, FOND OF PLAYING “TAG,” IN A BLUE SERGE DRESS, WITH HER HAIR IN A BRAID.

CHILDHOOD

II

ALBANY

My Darling Beatrice:

Awfully funny things have happened at our house! Papa has gone away all of a sudden and taken all his clothes with him, and they won't tell me where he is gone to, nor when he is coming back! And as if that was n't enough trouble, dear Grandma has come all at once to visit us, and for a dreadfully long time I guess, for she has brought lots of trunks, but did n't bring me any present.

I heard her tell Mama that it was all for the best that Papa had gone away, so I believe he is looking for a fortune or buried treasure somewhere, and maybe he will come back awfully rich. If he does I will let you know.

CHILDHOOD

I think Mama misses him terribly, because she won't let me mention his name, and cries whenever Grandma is n't looking. She won't have anything of Papa's around. I suppose because they make her homesick for him, and Mr. Roberts, our lawyer who made Uncle Ned's will who left Mama all his money, comes nearly ever day, I guess to keep her from being lonesome. But if I was my Papa I would be jealous.

Nobody hardly comes to see us any more. I suppose people think they will wait till Papa comes back, and Mama does n't have her day at all. It's awfully stupid, that is the reason I am writing to you. I can't play with my little girl friends. I do n't see why. I think I could miss my Papa just as much, if I was having a good time.

O, you know my lovely white cat

CHILDHOOD

Launcelot? Well what do you think? —he has had kittens! Five little pussies! I have not decided yet whether to give them girl's or boy's names, which would you if you were me? I just love your pink note paper. May I get some like it?

Write soon. Your loving little friend,

SUSIE.

P. S. I have just been told that we are going far away to a place called Dakota to live for six months.

I suppose that is where Papa is and we are going to join him.

SUSIE.

P. S. Do n't forget about your note paper.

SUE.

CHILDHOOD

I

NEW YORK.

My Dearest Susie:

What a *child* you are! Do n't you know what it is about your Papa and Mama? They are going to be *divorced*. I know all about it, they have talked about nothing else at dinner at our house for several days. Mama's maid told me what she knew, and I told Thompson what I had managed to hear at the table, and between us we have made it all out. I think it is *perfectly awful* the way grown up people keep us children in ignorance, or at least try to. My parents do n't succeed very well any longer, because I understand them. As soon as they begin to talk mysteriously I always pretend to be sleepy or thinking of something else,

CHILDHOOD

and then really and truly listen with all my might and main. The moment Mama says, "O Will, you know the woman I met yesterday, the one we passed coming home from church, you know, well—" you see, not mentioning any names, then I know it's something they do n't want me to understand. I do n't see how they can think us so stupid, do you? Just like when baby brother came last summer, they told me he came down in a *rainstorm*, and my dear, it had n't rained for a week, and yet he was a bran new child, any one could see that, so it could n't have been a rainstorm, and there's a mystery there too, and I shall make *that* out some day.

Your Papa has been very naughty, I do n't know what he's done, but Mama does n't blame your Mama at all. But

CHILDHOOD

Papa sympathizes with him, which Mama says she can't understand, but I suspect maybe Papa's been naughty too. You know my dear, grown up people think *nearly everything* is naughty, so it probably isn't much, and I think you can have an awfully good time, because when your Mama is cross you can go and live with your Papa, and when he is cross go back to her. And then you ought to get twice as much candy and spending money. And divorce can't be anything wrong. There's nothing about it in the catechism or the commandments. It's just like when you play house and get tired. I guess your Papa's tired. I am *very gay* just now. Dancing school has begun again, Wednesdays from 4 to 6, and last Wednesday Bobby Morton danced with me four times. All the other girls were awfully

CHILDHOOD

jealous because he is the best dancer there and can even reverse a little. I heard a grown up lady admire us together, and I *do* think we look well, and I had on my white lace dress, with a pink sash and patent leather, real patent leather slippers. You must n't tell, but I gave him a candy motto with Forget me not Forget me never on it, and he gave me a lovely nut carved like a little basket, which I wear on a ribbon around my neck, it scratches me awfully, and I have *such a time* to hide it from Thompson when she washes me in the morning! I am engaged to Bobby for *all* the waltzes for next Wednesday, and tonight when we play post office, at a party I am invited to, I am going to choose him. But I sha'n't let him kiss me. I shall run away when he

CHILDHOOD

tries to, unless he tries awfully hard. I do n't intend to spoil my dress. It's a lovely party and *awfully late*, we are asked from *seven* till *ten*, and Mama says I may stay till half past nine. Do n't tell any one about Bobby. Of course it's only a *flirtation*.

Perhaps you will all go in mourning for your divorce, that would be fun. I wonder how long it lasts. I will ask Thompson. Think how nice it would be to use black edged paper. Oh yes, about my pink paper, *of course* you know my dear, you *can copy it* if you like. I do n't mind at all. Only I *do* think it would be nicer if you did n't.

With love and kisses,

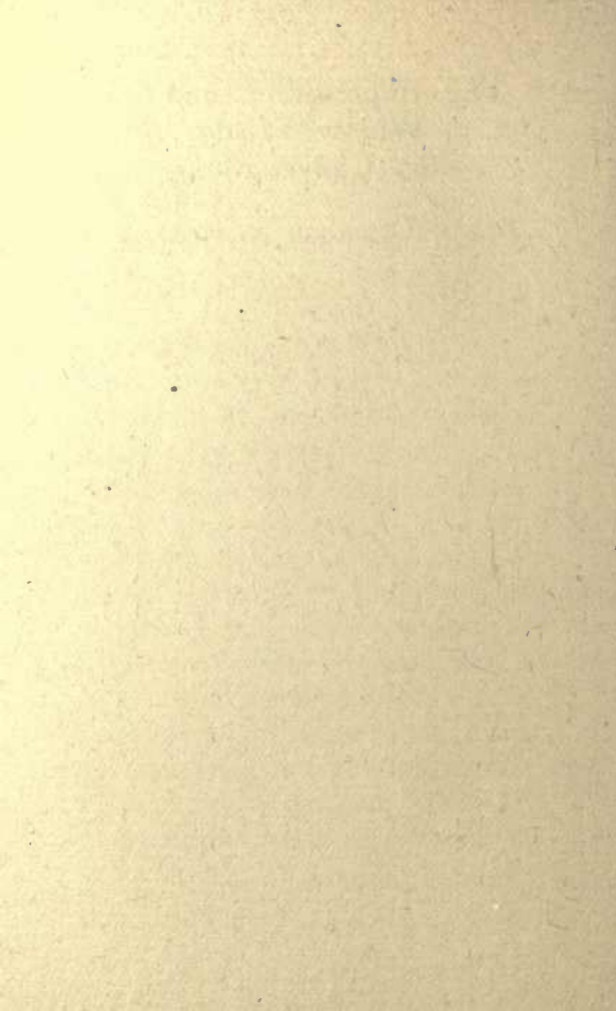
BEATRICE.

P. S. Excuse blots and mistakes and write soon.

CHILDHOOD

P. S. I forgot about the kittens. If I were you I would give half girls' names, and half boys', because you know you never can tell how children will turn out.

The Impressionist and the
Widowed Lady:
Six Conversations.



The Impressionist and The Widowed Lady: Six Conversations.

I.

It was one of those warm spring days and I felt like taking life pleasantly — pleasantly, that is, with Mrs. Turnbull. It was early, only a little after three, as I went up the steps, and I said to myself: “There’ll be no one else, and we can skip all the nothings. I wasn’t prepared for a fashionable visit; I’d been lunching at the club in a serge suit and my last year’s spring overcoat; the latter with my low hat I could leave in the hall unseen, and I felt, in the careful light always to be found in

SIX CONVERSATIONS

Mrs. Turnbull's discreet drawing-room, and under her friendly, uncritical eyes, my informal appearance might escape notice. She was "at home." Her little maid is so sympathetic and cool looking — such an attraction in a maid servant; however, a cool appearance to my mind is more essential to any sort of a servant than a "character." I moved toward the drawing-room, the maid preceding me, and suddenly there was a babble of voices, among which my name fell like a pebble, creating a ripple of murmurs. It was too late to retreat, and I followed my name, a little timidly, into — a *ladies' lunch party!* If ever a fish felt out of water! I bowed and was introduced all around, Mrs. Turnbull evidently wishing to help me out of my embarrassment. One woman I had owed a duty visit

SIX CONVERSATIONS

for months, and had vowed to her only the night before at a dinner that I was absolutely tied to my easel all the day with a difficult portrait, and was making no calls. You'd never have thought it was *spring* from *her* greeting of me! A second lady (there's no use bothering with their names — they were the same names one hears everywhere) said she thought I was abroad. (I had forgotten an invitation from her this winter till too late to answer, and in desperation had let it go, intending to disclaim ever having received it, were I called to account.) The third luncheon guest was some one who had on several occasions refused to make my acquaintance, audibly, considering many of my pictures "indecent, *and* impressionistic" (her words). The last guest was one of those cupid-ridden women who fall

SIX CONVERSATIONS

in love with every man they meet, and for whom the whole world is divided into three classes : — the men they *have* flirted with “*desperately*,” and the men they *are* flirting with “*desperately*,” and the men they *hope* to flirt with “*desperately!*” No man could escape this sort of amorous switch-back with Mrs. Tindley when once introduced without being unpardonably rude. Mrs. Turnbull introduced me and I was unpardonably rude. I hear she said last night at a late supper, that she couldn't understand what Mrs. Turnbull saw in me, and that I was hurting Mrs. T's reputation. I think this will come in conveniently for an excuse to go to see Mrs. Turnbull again to-day —but I must finish about my other visit.

I spoiled the luncheon party! Whether they were telling stories not

SIX CONVERSATIONS

proper for men to hear, or for what reason I don't know, but they all left.

Mrs. Turnbull gave a sigh to herself and a cigarette to me.

"You did wrong to refuse Mrs. Tindley's invitation."

"Why?" I asked.

"Idle men all find her amusing."

I don't know why it is, but women of the world always think painters, and writers, and musicians never have anything to do.

"Let's talk about you," I said. "I haven't seen you for two days."

"I know; I thought you were dead."

"Ah, you *did* notice it then?" I confess I was pleased.

"No, it was my sister-in-law, who notices everything, and who has been lunching with me all this week, who remarked it."

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“I am glad you are not going to be too nice to me to-day,” was my apparently irrelevant answer.

“Why not?”

“Because when you tease me I know you care for me.”

“Clever boy, you’ll never be teased again by *me!*”

“A mean advantage,” I began meekly.

“Don’t be sad over it,” she replied. “You know with us women advantages are like secrets—impossible to keep.”

There was an encouraging note in this, but I was put out of key, and I remained in the banter mood.

“I hope,” I said emphatically, “you are not so desperate for occupation as to have taken up the inequalities of the sexes. You are not going to be *new!*”

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“Oh no,” she laughed, “I’m not old enough yet.”

“How old are you?”

She rose. “Good afternoon,” she said. “I am only *interviewed* between the hours of 11 and 12.30 A. M.”

“I only asked (*I kept my chair*) because Mrs. Pankgor said——”

“What did that woman say,” she gasped interruptingly, and reseating herself heavily at the same time.

“That you didn’t look your age whatever it was.”

“What did she mean?”

“I don’t know; that’s why I asked.”

“I should say it was complimentary; what do you think?”

“That, or jealousy.”

“Jealousy! Of *you!*”

This hadn’t occurred to me, but I

SIX CONVERSATIONS

shrugged my shoulders significantly to watch the effect.

“You conceited thing!” she added.

I regretted my little maneuver after this unsatisfactory outcome.

“Oh, no, I didn’t mean that, of course!” I protested.

“*Really men are——*”

“But I didn’t mean that, I say!”

“Oh, it’s too late to take it back now!”

“I’m not taking it back.”

“Well, then, why are you painting her portrait?”

“For money.”

“I’ll believe that when I see her husband’s check.”

“You don’t really think——”

“It’s a notorious fact that Mr. Van Tinkleton happened in on you and found the canvas barely touched,

SIX CONVERSATIONS

although his wife had given you thirteen sittings !”

“Thirteen is an unlucky number !”

“You had only painted in half the face.”

“It was finished down to the lips !”

“Yes. A nice place to stop work — for a while !”

“Really you’re not in earnest !” I expostulated.

“Well at least I’m glad Mrs. Van Tinkleton’s portrait is finished, and I’ll be gladder when Mrs. Pankgor’s is.”

“So will I.”

“Honestly ?”

“Yes.” A wild hope seized my heart and carried it away and me with it. My voice trembled as I said :

“Mrs. Turnbull——”

“No, you mustn’t.”

“Mustn’t what ?”

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“Say what you are going to.”

“What am I going to say?”

“Mrs. Van Tinkleton,” announced the maid. Somehow or other she didn’t seem so cool as usual, or else I wasn’t.

“Not at——” began Mrs. Turnbull, but stopped as the lady herself entered.

“Only a moment; I won’t keep you a moment,” she said on seeing me — which I thought very bad taste in her. But at a signal from Mrs. Turnbull, which there was no mistaking (she held out her hand) I vowed I was just leaving.

“Don’t forget where we left off,” she said as I dropped her hand, or, to speak more literally, as she took it away, slowly, gracefully, sympathetically, but still away.

“After you stopped me, and said I

SIX CONVERSATIONS

mustn't go on?" I tried to throw reproach into my voice.

"Oh, well, perhaps I *won't* stop you next time!" was her parting shot.

"Then I shall surely remember," I answered. And now I'd give almost anything to know if she tried to pump Mrs. Tinkleton or not after I left. But Mrs. Tinkleton is *very* discreet. You can tell that from her husband.

SIX CONVERSATIONS

II.

“I am sorry to have kept you waiting,” she said as she trailed into the room in a charming afternoon conglomeration, “but I was signing checks.”

“In that dress!” I exclaimed, trying to make a compliment.

“Yes, it’s not paid for. I always sign checks in a dress that’s not paid for, it’s such a comfortable feeling to know that some one is willing to wait longer! It was charming of you to come in again so soon.”

“You did n’t expect me?”

“How dare I?” (*Smiling.*)

“I came in to say what you asked me to remember. You *did* ask me to remember something yesterday, did n’t you?”

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“No, did I?” Her eyes told me plainly she knew she did.

“Yes, you did.”

“I’d quite forgotten. But so much has happened since yesterday. Col. Capperly took me out to dinner at the Caningaides!”

I bit my mustache. She knows very well if there’s one man I dislike it’s Capperly. He is the most famous interrupter of *tête-à-têtes* in town, and the trouble is the women are always glad to have him turn up. I’ve never found a group of palms yet, that he could n’t see a couple thro’, or a cosy recess small for two, he did n’t know the exact position of, or in fact any retired and respectable place for a flirtation that he did n’t know the way to.

“Perhaps,” I said sulkily, “Capperly

SIX CONVERSATIONS

got ahead of me, and said what I was going to."

"Don't be ridiculous! Col. Capperly has won both times his wife sued for a divorce."

"He had a good lawyer."

"He had a good conscience, you mean."

"I think even he himself would call you a flatterer!" I felt irritated.

"Well at any rate he isn't *free*."

"No, and it's interesting to know that you realize what it is I have in mind to say to you," I remarked.

"O, I am not *sure*," she answered. "I only guess at it, and I may be wrong. You must tell me if I am or not, sometime!"

"Now!" I exclaimed eagerly.

"No. I'm blue to-day. Tell me a funny story instead."

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“I will describe my flirtation with Mrs. Van Tinkleton.”

“Then you really did have one?”

“I thought you knew.” I was sorry I had owned to it so easily.

“O, she told me so, but of course that was no proof. She told me last autumn when she came back to town she had been flirting like mad all summer with a man whose funeral I had attended eighteen months before.”

“What did you say?”

“I asked her if she never read the death notices?”

“Did she understand?”

“O, no! Mrs. Van Tinkleton never understands! She answered that only the marriage notices interested her, although she hoped some day some paper would be swell enough to publish a divorce column!”

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“How you dislike the woman,” I exclaimed involuntary.

“I dislike any woman whose child prefers her nurse to her mother, which little Violet most certainly does — not that I blame the child” — she added half humorously.

“You’re not a cynic after all, in spite of what the world says.”

“My dear friend, whatever one is, it is always in spite of what *somebody* says! But I told you I was blue; let’s go back to your flirtation. I congratulate you on the result.”

“How do you mean?” I asked.

“You’re the first man I’ve known to whom Gerty Van paid desperate attention, or who paid it to her — you can put it whichever way you choose — who didn’t either go all to pieces,

SIX CONVERSATIONS

or abroad, or to the dogs, or marry someone else immediately! Now you've done none of these."

"Perhaps I'd like to have done one of them."

"Do n't be silly!" she said in a half warning, half encouraging way.

"How you jump at conclusions!" I answered, amused at the chance of turning the tables on her.

"I'll make you sorry for that," she replied, suddenly becoming serious, as women will in the middle of a jest when they find themselves caught.

"That I do n't doubt," I replied.

Then there was a pause. She took up two antique silver ornaments from the table beside her, examined each minutely in turn, and then put them back again.

"I wish I knew —"

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“What?” she asked, looking up expectantly, but sharply.

I vacillated. “If your lightness, your inconsequence, goes really beneath the surface? or if there is something more serious behind it?”

“Why not try to be serious yourself, and see what you could bring out of me?”

“As if I never was.”

“O! well, then, you should have some sign, some signal—violets in your button-hole when you are serious; rose pinks on your frivolous days.”

“Ah! You are in the same quandary about me as I about you!”

“Not at all! Personally I know you to be light as the air. But Mrs. Van-Tinkleton vows that your seriousness quite bored her to death, which was her reason for breaking it off!”

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“She said that did she? Well, then, I will tell you about our flirtation.”

“You forget that she has already told me.”

“I always like you when you speak of Mrs. Van Tinkleton!” I inserted.

“Why?” she asked, puzzled.

“Because you always seem jealous, and that flatters —”

“I’ll never mention the woman’s name again in your presence!”

This time my diplomacy had won.

“I’ll do the talking of her instead. To begin with, there is our flirtation!”

“I really don’t care to hear about it,” and she pretended to yawn — not wide enough to spoil her adorable mouth, so that the *ennui* was rather feeble. But I humored her.

“You are tired,” I said. “I will go.”

SIX CONVERSATIONS

“No, do n't; tell me some good books to read.”

She was quite serious. Was it a ruse? I knew I must be wary, but I decided to take her in earnest.

“Why do n't you tackle a little Ibsen?” I suggested.

“What's his last book?”

I told her.

“That! I read it long ago.”

“And the others?” I queried a little faintly.

“I've read them all.” She was looking out of the window. At least her head was turned that way.

“You might take up Maeterlinck!” I thought, as I spoke, of the quickest way to explain who he was.

“On the shelf there at your right you will find autograph copies of everything he's ever written. We were

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great friends the winter I spent in Brussels. I know some of his works by heart."

I was dumb!

"Do you like Maeterlinck?" she asked.

"I've never read him," I answered honestly.

"O!"

"There's Max Nordau's book, that everyone was talking of, 'Degeneration!'"

"I hate it. You don't mean to say you like it?"

"I do n't know," I said, desperately. "I have n't read that either!"

"What have you read?" she asked, amused. "Trilby?"

"No, not even that," I answered. "I heard it talked about too much."

"Of course you can read?"

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“If I try hard.”

“What, Ouida?”

“No, she bores me to death. George Meredith is my favorite novelist.”

“Not really!!”

There was no disguising her surprise, and I felt hurt.

“I did n't mean to say it that way,” she pleaded honestly, “and I'm so glad, too, because he's one of mine!”

A clock struck. I had no idea it was so late. I was obliged to go. It was n't till I rose that I remembered I had bought a bunch of violets for her on the street, and thrust them into my *coat tail* pocket!

“How strange,” she murmured innocently. “I smell violets.”

“Thought transference,” I said; “they are the ones I am going to bring you my next call.”

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“I have no engagement for three to-morrow.”

“I have one, made at this moment,”
and I kissed her hand.

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III.

“ Well, you see I’ve come ! ” I said as I entered.

“ Yes, so I perceive, ” she replied with a very conventional smile. “ Won’t you sit down ? ”

“ Really, ” I answered, feeling a little chilled by the reception ; “ really I expected a somewhat different greeting than simply to be asked to sit down. ”

“ Oh, well, then, ” she smiled, “ stand. ”

“ I refer to your manners, ” I argued, “ but you say sit down as if I were an ordinary visitor, and only expected to stay a few minutes. ”

“ And how long do you intend to remain ? ”

This was a poser.

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“I only ask,” she continued, “because I should beg you to stay it—three hours, four hours, or whatever it may be!”

“Suppose it were not three hours, or four hours—suppose I had come to stay forever.”

“Oh, in that case,” and she laughed, “I certainly would n’t ask you to sit down!”

“What would you do?”

“What *could* I do! I think I should call in the police! Because really you know I could n’t have you staying here always. What would my sister-in-law say!”

“Am I to take that seriously?”

“As seriously as I take you.”

“But I want you to,” I pleaded.

“Want me to what? Do you know,” she added quickly before I

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could answer her, "that I think that you are a horrid pessimist."

"You're awfully good," I said, rather taken aback, and wondering into which pocket I should put my gloves. "But I'm afraid I can't live up to your opinion," and I deposited the little wad of suede in the last place I should think of looking for it on leaving.

"Why?" she asked.

"You tell me why you made the remark first. *Place aux dames!*" I answered.

"Not nowadays," she laughed, "except when they grab it and stick there! No, explain to me first and afterward I will tell you." Of course she did n't, but I did. However, I can't say she seemed particularly persuaded.

I remembered her violets, which this

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time I had left for safety in the hall, and brought them in to her.

“How nice of you to have thought of them,” she said. “I should n’t have.”

“I don’t believe you,” I answered.

She laughed. “I shall wear these to the private view of the Fine Arts Society this afternoon.”

“Are you going?” The note of disappointment in my voice was quite childish.

“Not till late? But are n’t you going?” in a tone of invitation.

“Oh, yes, *late*,” and I smiled at her, so that she was obliged to lift the violets to her face, and played hide-and-go-seek with my adoring admiration.

“You must explain all the pictures. You know how ignorant I am,” she remarked.

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“Yes, I found that out discussing books with you yesterday!”

“Oh, but pictures, which reminds me of what my dear father who is n't an impressionist said of the pink and purple nymph ladies you paint on yellow lawns.”

“What did he say?”

“I was trying to make him like them, and said, ‘there’s royal purple for you, father,’ and he said, ‘yes, but not enough fine linen!’”

I laughed. “Witty daughter of a wittier father!”

“Why did n't you put it in Latin?” she queried.

I ignored this. “You know I think you really agree with your father. You do n't like my pictures either.”

“Not your portrait of Mrs. Van Tinkleton. It took too long to paint!”

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“And the one of Mrs. Pankgor?”

“Oh, *that*, I loathe! There was never a ball big enough to warrant that dress of hers. She might as well be a living picture and be done with it. My only hope is you'll paint *her* black and blue too!”

“And when I paint *you*?”

“No thank you! I like to look at impressionist pictures of other people, but for my own portrait I'll either wear a high necked gown and a veil, or go elsewhere!”

“I don't believe you mean what you say.”

“You see you *are* pessimistic. You don't believe a word I say.”

“There's one word I'm only too ready to believe.”

“It's a good thing to know. Perhaps some day when I'm *very* desper-

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ate, I'll say it! Meanwhile tell me about your pictures this afternoon—how many have you in the exhibition?"

"Three." I would have given anything to change the conversation, but couldn't see my way to.

"All portraits of ladies?" she asked with a horrid little smile, lifting her eyebrows.

"No, only two."

"Oh, *only* two! Mrs. Van Tinkleton, and ——?"

"Mrs. Pankgor—I finished her yesterday."

"In how many sittings did you finish Mrs. Pankgor?"

"In six."

"How many of these six did it take for Mrs. Pankgor to finish you?"

"I am not yet finished by Mrs. Pankgor!"

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“ Oh, then I suppose there will be more sittings.”

“ I thought we were not going to discuss Mrs. Pankgor any more.”

“ I can't help it ! I can't resist the temptation, you are so deliciously easy to tease ! ”

“ But is it fair to Mrs. Pankgor ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! *She'd* be delighted to have her name connected with any one's, and besides it would flatter her to death to think I am jealous of her.”

“ *Are you ?* ”

“ Yes, I am.”

“ Mrs. Turnbull — ” I began, passionately.

“ Because she can afford to go to a much better dressmaker than I can.”

“ That's ridiculous ! ” I said, angry at her turning the conversation in that way.

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“Not at all. She’s a splendid lay figure. Any model from Paris is sure to fit her, so would the waists on a wax dummy in a hair-dresser’s, but that’s not our business, is it! You know how conspicuous she always makes herself, so she gets her gowns at half price in consideration of the advertisement she gives!”

“I don’t follow you very well,” I murmured.

“Oh, of course, men are never sympathetic about women’s dress!”

“That’s an old indictment, but did you ever consider for a moment how absolutely stony women are about a man’s more or less necessary equipment! Suppose *we* never wanted *you* to change the shape of *your* hats!”

She laughed. “It’s true, I don’t like changes in men.”

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The cool little maid entered.

“The brougham is at the door, madam.”

We rose.

“To go to the exhibition,” Mrs. Turnbull said. “I must get ready; it won’t take me five minutes; will you wait for me?”

“I will wait for you, so long as I live.”

“We may take long, but not a man’s lifetime, to put on our hat and gloves.”

“It may seem a lifetime to the man. But it wasn’t for that I meant I will wait.”

“No?”

“No.”

“You are tremendously fascinating! I don’t wonder all the women want you to paint them!”

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“ You are making fun of me,” I said, feeling very uncomfortable.

“ Not at all ” — she moved toward the hall — “ and in five minutes I ’ll be yours — for the rest of the afternoon.”

“ No longer ? ” I cried as she passed through the curtains.

“ I lunch alone to-morrow at one. My sister-in-law has the grip, thank goodness ! — I mean I ’m sorry to say ! ” And I heard her humming “ You can’t play in our yard ” as she mounted the stairs.

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IV.

“I thought I was very early,” I said, surprised to find Mrs. Turnbull downstairs waiting for me, and before one.

“You are,” she answered, shaking my hand cordially, “but I thought we would n’t lose any time over beginning luncheon because that sister-in-law of mine is better after all and threatens to come over.”

“What if she does?” I asked.

“Oh, well, if you must know, I did a very foolish thing to get out of lunching with her. I said I was having company at home, and when she asked who, I said, in desperation, a kindergarten meeting!”

“Well?”

“Well! She promised she’d try and come in early in the afternoon!”

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“ Oh ! ”

“ Yes, you ’ll acknowledge, it will be hard to explain where you come into a kindergarten.”

Luncheon was announced.

“ Why does your sister dislike me ? ”

“ She ’s afraid I ’m going to marry you ! ”

“ I wish I were afraid of that.”

“ Do n’t wish any such thing ! I have it, too, and it ’s a dreadful feeling.”

I spilled my grape fruit *au kirsche* into my lap.

“ Do n’t play with me,” I begged rather foolishly ; “ are you in earnest ? ”

“ Yes, seriously,” she answered, with a very opposite look from seriousness in her eyes. “ Seriously, it almost amounts to a mania with me, that I shall some time marry you.” I opened my lips to

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“Although,” she continued, oddly enough, “it is true that if you asked me to-day to be your wife, I should say no, of course, with grateful regret.”

I decided *not* to speak at that moment. After a long pause, during which she eat with apparently the keenest satisfaction, I finally asked her why?

The maid came in, and we spoke of the peas.

“It is n’t fair! It is n’t fair!” I burst out the moment we were alone again.

“What is n’t fair?” she asked, pretending great surprise and curiosity.

“The way you have of lifting me up almost as high as the heavens and then dropping me — way, way down, all of a sudden!”

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“ Dear me, is n't the wine good ? ”
she asked.

“ Of course ! ”

“ Did you want a cocktail first ?
How stupid of me, I forgot. ”

“ Oh ! I am not a slave to cocktails,
thank you. ”

“ Then what *is* the matter ? ”

“ Never mind — I 'm sorry I ex-
pressed myself as I did. ”

“ You are angry because I said I felt
I should marry you some time ! ”

I gave her only one look, but I am
sure it bled ! Then I said, “ I think if we
ever were married, you would not turn
up at the church just to tease me, but
would be waiting for me with another
minister at the door of your home. ”

“ I certainly should prefer a home
wedding, ” she murmured, which hardly
seemed to me to the point.

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“Suppose we change the conversation,” she said, “as we do n’t agree.”

“By George, you are the most tantalizing woman!”

“Listen to me—something has gone wrong with you—whom are you painting now?”

“Mrs. Nooton. She came and gave me the order. I could n’t refuse.”

“You poor fellow; Jane,” as the maid entered, “fill Mr. Bowles’ glass. Really if I had known I would have been more sympathetic. What will you do with her nose?”

“I shall flatter it.”

“Heavens! I thought you were going to say *flatten* it, and I was about to wager with you, *there* was a case where you could n’t get ahead of nature! Of course you will paint her in profile, the left side—even an Im-

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pressionist would hesitate I think to reproduce the right! It's the right eye that does it, you know! All her married life she's kept that eye on her husband, no matter what she's been doing herself, and this is the awful result. I'd hate to see her husband as that eye sees him! Would n't you?"

"What has Mrs. Nooton done?"

"Shall I tell you? She's ashamed of her own father and mother, because she's married to Nooton, and never once has anyone seen either of them at her house. No, I thank you! that sort of a person does n't interest me, and I am surprised that *you* should take so much pleasure in painting her."

"But I do n't."

"I'm really very sorry if my little *tête-à-tête* luncheon interrupted your sittings."

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“ But it did n't.”

“ I've never seen one eye without the other, but, of course, if you're painting her profile—the left side—why, that eye alone may be very fascinating ! ”

“ How absurd you are ! ”

“ Oh, I've known much plainer women than she turn men's heads.”

“ If I dared I should think you were jealous of her.”

“ Oh ! that 's *too* funny ! ”

“ Well, it 's odd you never like anyone I paint.”

“ That's not true. I loved your sitter of last month.”

“ My aunt ! Oh, yes.”

“ One of the most charming women I ever met.”

“ But not young.”

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“I hope you are not one of those men who discuss women’s ages.”

“I hope you are not one of those women who are afraid to.”

“Certainly not!” she said, somewhat emphatically, and added, I thought unnecessarily, “I am thirty-one.”

“Then I was born the same year as yourself. I volunteered in ’64.”

“Yes,” she said, “and that makes you five years my junior.”

“How in the world — ?”

“A woman at my age is always five years older than a man the same.”

“Yes, but a woman is always about five years younger than her actual age.”

“True.”

“Then if my age makes you five years older than I, your own age makes you still five years younger, so we come out the same after all.”

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“I never could understand arithmetic,” she said, stirring her coffee around three times one way, exactly, then three times the other, “but after going through that elaborate detail, I think you at least might have made me out five years younger than you.”

“I will begin all over again.”

“No! No! Smoke instead!” and she moved some cigarettes toward me.

The maid spoke to her softly. I had a wretched presentiment.

“No, do n't smoke!” she said dramatically.

“Your sister-in-law?” I asked.

“Yes, she's come.”

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V.

“It’s very odd,” she said, “but I sort of thought you would come in to-day.”

I could n’t tell if she were satirical or not, but considering this was my fifth consecutive daily visit, I was suspicious.

“It was merely an accident,” I equivocated, and made her angry.

“Now, I want you to understand,” she said, “that I started out in a pleasant humor this afternoon, and that if I’m disagreeable it’s because you were horrid your very first speech.”

“I did n’t mean to be,” I said very meekly, “but to be honest, I heard you were with the Lindsays at the opera last night, and Jack Piffleton sat beside you the whole evening — never moved once, no matter who came into the box.”

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“Do you think you’ve chosen a very kind way of showing your sympathy?”

“What sympathy?”

“Now, don’t pretend to be dense, for *that* you are n’t if you *are* an impressionist.”

“If you did n’t want him by you the entire evening you could have rid yourself of him somehow.”

“In Heaven’s name, how? - Tell me, so that in another such emergency I may be prepared.”

“You could have talked to people across him or behind him, which hint he would probably have taken; or if the worst came to the worst, you could have devoted yourself to the opera.”

“That is exactly what I did do. I’m sure I never before heard so much

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of an opera at a single representation ! It was *Die Gotterdamerung*, and at the end I felt I knew the whole thing as well as I did Faust ! ”

“ I do n't believe you , ” I said emphatically .

“ You never believe me , you know , ” she smilingly answered .

“ You always listen to the operas . ”

“ Always to *one* act one evening , and choose a different act each time , so that by the end of the season I am almost sure to have heard every opera through once ! ”

“ That 's absurd ! You are well known for your love and knowledge of music . Why pretend ignorance ? ”

“ I 've heard it was so becoming ! ”

“ Nonsense ! ”

“ Really ! Do you appreciate that your last three replies to me have been ;

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‘I do n’t believe you,’ ‘That’s absurd,’ and ‘Nonsense!’ I shall become angry!”

“I love you angry!”

“Then I won’t be.”

“But, come, acknowledge you are a deeply dyed Wagnerite.”

“I hope I do n’t look like Aubrey Beardsley’s picture of them in the Yellow Book.”

“Nobody looks like Aubrey Beardsley’s pictures!”

“Oh, I do n’t know. Wait till you finish Mrs. Nooton’s portrait. If it’s a good likeness, you may find yourself classed among the degenerates?”

“I have half a mind to behave like Whistler and Mrs. Mackay and cut up Mrs. Nooton’s portrait.”

“I would n’t bother. Leave that to the critics; they’ll do it for you. Be-

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sides, do you think you paint well enough to behave like Whistler?"

"I *knew* you did n't like my work!"

"That speech of mine was not kind," she said, actually blushing. "I'm sorry for it, and to punish myself I shall tell you honestly about my opinion of your pictures."

I was frightened, but begged her go on.

"Well," she said, "the truth is I like you personally so *very* much, I don't dare trust myself to criticize your painting. If there were faults all over it, like advertisements on the rocks up the Hudson, I shouldn't see them."

I almost gasped for breath with which to speak quickly before she could interrupt, but she realized my intention and spoke first.

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“No,” she urged, “don’t. What I said is quite true, but it wasn’t easy for me to tell it you, and if you took advantage of it, I’d never forgive you!”

“Why?” I asked, not altogether understanding her.

“I don’t know. I should feel as if I’d hinted,—er—led you on.”

I actually laughed. This seemed so ridiculous.

“I don’t think you read my thoughts very well,” she suggested, “or else I disguise them very successfully. I’ve sometimes thought I *would* make a good actress. What do you think?”

“That depends. What sort of an actress?”

“Oh, of course, a leading one, a star, or something of that sort.”

“But emotional, I mean, or comedy, or a song and dance *artiste*?”

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“ Oh, either or all. Amateurs, you know, never limit themselves ! ”

“ Then you are not serious ? ”

“ Of course not ! Music-struck and book-struck, and picture-struck, I may be, but not stage-struck — except to go to the theater. That I confess I *do* enjoy. But one thing I am sure of, if I were an actress I should insist on playing the naughty ladies. They always have the best parts. I don't know why it is, but good ladies on the stage are usually so dull, the naughty ladies never. I wonder why ? Have you any idea ? Why is it that the naughty one is always witty and bright and perfectly dressed — up to the last act, and beautiful, always beautiful, even up to the end ; and the poor, good one, is sing-songy usually, and a little old — just a little, say under the chin —

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and wears dresses buttoned up the back, or ugly hats, or cheaper clothes, or something different. It isn't so in real life. Now, is it? Bad women overdress themselves almost surely, and as for absolute choice give me a good woman always. How do you feel about it?"

"Oh!" I rang in, "give me a good woman for always, will you," and I held out my hand.

She waved it aside, with a sweet whimsical look that saved my feelings.

"Of course," she said, "I know there are some men who *prefer* common law wives!"

"Oh, no, it is the common law wives who prefer them!"

"Do you believe in actors and actresses marrying?"

"I believe in everybody marrying."

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“What would all the old maids say to that?”

“Thank you! Probably.”

“And the old bachelors?”

“Go to the d——l!”

“Really!” she exclaimed, as if honestly surprised. “Why do you make that difference between them?”

“The old bachelors bear a grudge against the ceremony, because they’ve all been refused by the right woman; but the old maids have only themselves to blame if they rejected the right man, and so they are more lenient all round. I wonder if *I* shall be an old bachelor?”

“I wonder?”

“What do you think?” I asked, trying to be cunning with a woman, and of course failing.

“How can I tell? Why do n’t you go to a clairvoyant?”

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“Are you superstitious?” I asked.

“Not at all,” she answered. “Of course there a few things like sitting thirteen at a table that I never do; not that I am afraid, only I do n’t believe in running any unnecessary risk! It *might* come true.”

“What? That I shall be a bachelor?”

“Oh, are you still thinking of that? It will be your own fault if you are.”

“Why?” I asked, hopefully.

“I know at least two girls who’d jump at you.”

“Pretty?”

“No—not exactly; still the man who paints Mrs. Nooton would have no right to object.”

“Young?”

“No—at least not very—that is—well, no.”

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“Slender?”

“One is.”

“And the other, large?”

“Yes, I thought I’d give you a choice.”

“Thank you! Have they an appreciation of art?”

“No, but one has enough money to buy all the pictures you’ll ever paint. The other is poor but very healthy; has all the domestic virtues.”

“And you think I have a chance with them?”

“I don’t want to flatter you, but I believe if you hurry you have. It will be a case of first come first served.”

“And you advise?”

The joke had been carried too far, and we were both of us “on edge.”

“I advise you, either or both,” she said.

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“Thank you again. You have paid me a great compliment.” I rose. So did she, as she spoke.

“It was unintentional. I apologize.”

“I accept your apology.” I bowed.

“How dare you!” she said, flushing, “how dare you take an apology from *me*! You should have said the fault was all yours.”

“It is.” I started to go, then I turned around impulsively. “I am quite unsettled,” I said, “and I have n’t the slightest idea what it’s all about,” and I looked at her dolefully.

“Neither have I,” she answered with lips that trembled—from laughter or tears, I do n’t know which, or perhaps half and half. At that moment another visitor was announced.

“I meant to have left word I was not in,” she murmured, as I passed her;

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and I wrote "tomorrow at four" on a card, and taking a bunch of flowers out of a vase in the hall sent them in to her with the pasteboard doubled round them.

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VI.

I was late, but it was unavoidable. Somebody else's business detained me — I would n't have allowed my own to — and consequently I felt somewhat nervous as I was ushered in. It was pouring outside, too, and that lowered my spirits a little. She greeted me charmingly, *too* charmingly my instinct told me, and her first words proved it right. She couldn't resist the temptation to tease.

“How *good* of you to come, after all,” she said. “I'm so glad! When I saw it was raining — a little — (it was really ‘cats and dogs’) I was afraid you would n't venture out! I suppose you waited to see if it would n't clear up.”

“I knew you could n't resist the

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temptation to tease me," was my smiling reply, for I felt this time I had the best of her.

"Victory for *you*," she acknowledged, pushing towards me my favorite chair, "and we are both in a good humor to-day, are n't we?"

"I am always in a good humor!"

"Oh!" So am I," she answered.

"Well, then, that's settled," and I sank into the chair. "The next question is how long are we to remain so?"

"I do n't like to discuss periods of time with you. I notice you only have one series of adverbs, such as 'always,' 'forever,' and 'as long as I live.'"

"And you dislike them?"

"I do n't say that; it depends — but they are a little extreme, do n't you think so?"

"Do you realize that I have called

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on you every day this week, and is n't that a little extreme? This is the sixth visit."

"I do n't know if you are right in your calculation or not, but I'll ask my sister-in-law. She's sure to have kept count."

"But how will she know?"

"I do n't know how. She has strange and, I believe, occult means of finding out everything. She is much more of an authority on my own affairs than I am! For one thing, she has a window in sight of which my front door naïvely is. Of course she never watches, but she sits in that window, and naturally she does n't shut her eyes. Then she is very neighborly, never misses a day coming over, and each one of her questions is sure to hit some nail on the head. Verifies her eyes through

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her ears, as it were. Do n't think I mean she 's prying, because she is n't. She's a dear soul, and a born mother, that 's all, and not having any children, she has to take care of anything that comes her way, even a widowed sister-in-law very near her own age."

"If you *need* any one to take care of you," I began.

"Oh, dear, no!" she answered. "I am tired to death of it; I want to take care of somebody myself for a little while!"

"Just the opportunity I 'm looking for," I said. "Why not try me?"

"You flatter my capabilities."

"You think I would be a difficult subject to handle?"

"Yes," she laughed. "I am afraid it would be a case of playing with fire and burning one's fingers!"

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“I wish I *did* know your real opinion of me!” I sighed.

“Is n’t that a very courageous wish?” she suggested.

“Well, then, I’ll put it this way. I wish *you* could know my opinion of you!”

“But I *do* know it.”

“I’ve never told you.”

“Have n’t you? Oh! however, other people have.”

“Who?”

“Let me see. . . My sister-in-law for one.”

“Hang ——!” I stopped.

“How is it out,” she asked. “Warm?”

I laughed, and broke up my anger. “Not so warm as indoors just at this moment,” I said. Then a brilliant idea came to me, and I added: “I’ll

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tell you what I'm going to do! I'm going to ask your sister-in-law to let me paint her portrait!"

"Tom Bowles, do you care as much for me as all that!"

"Do you think she'll like the idea?"

"Like! She'll be flattered to death. Her personal appearance is her one weak point!"

"Of course I shall expect *you* to come with her and chaperone us during the sittings."

"Oh!"

"And you must give me points to help me win her over to my side."

"Your side of what?"

"As if you did n't understand me!"

"Let's hope *she* won't understand you! Of course you won't pretend to paint her life-size, it would be too awful, and take too much paint! And by

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all means give her a waist. That will please her and be becoming at the same time. And make her wear a bonnet. Strings will supply a chin, and, all jesting aside, what's a woman without one! But she won't wear gloves, I warn you of that *now*; and if you are wise you'll have the left hand in evidence, and paint in conspicuously the diamond ring on the third finger. She bought it herself, but she never takes it off, and always sighs twice after any one has admired it! It really is a lovely ring, and I believe in another year or so she'll believe absolutely in it herself. It would n't be a bad thing if a good many of us had her imagination."

"Do n't you think the *real* thing is better than the imaginary?"

"Sometimes."

"Mrs. Turnbull, why do you hold

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me off so?" As I spoke I vowed to myself "now or never."

"Hold you off!" and she laughed, nervously, "what a remark. I do n't hold you in any way!"

"I can't, I won't jest any more about it," I said, "and if you are the woman I love you'll listen to me."

"I'll listen to you," she answered, with a final flicker of her teasing humor, "whether I am the lady you mention or not."

"You know," I continued, paying no attention to what she had said, "a busy man does not go to see a woman every day in the week simply to kill time! You know a man does not try to propose to a woman on an average of twice an afternoon for a week unless he means it! You know if a man can't take his eyes from your face that he

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loves you, and you have never seen my eyes wander. You know, you must, that uncertainty even for an alumnus half-back is terrible. I've been on tip-toe night and day all week; I've been embracing the empty air, and kissing the unsubstantial sunshine and moonlight! My patience is all gone, but my love remains immovable. Why have you let me get so far toward asking you the one leading question in Cupid's catechism, and then every time pulled me up short — breathless and angry? Why?"

"I'll tell you," she said earnestly, interrupting me before I could say more. "The truth is, you've been so nervous about it, so timid, suggesting everything, and saying nothing, beating around the bush, and leading up the point by easy stages, that by the time

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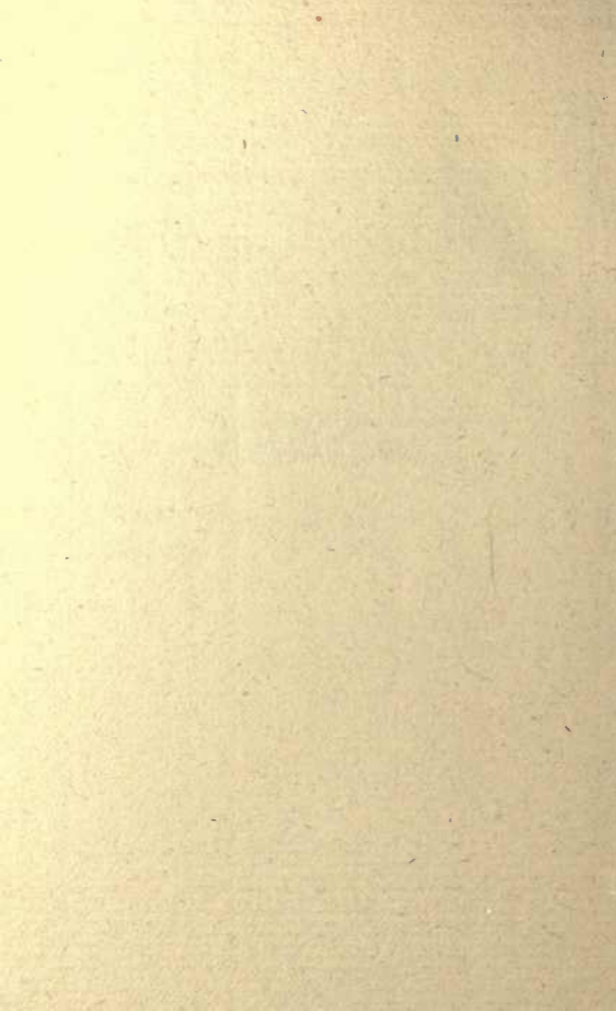
you were ready to say the word I was so nervous myself and fidgety, I was actually afraid! A sort of stage fright it was. I didn't dare let you speak. If you had ever asked me straight out I do n't doubt I'd have accepted you long ago." She paused only for breath, but I did n't wait.

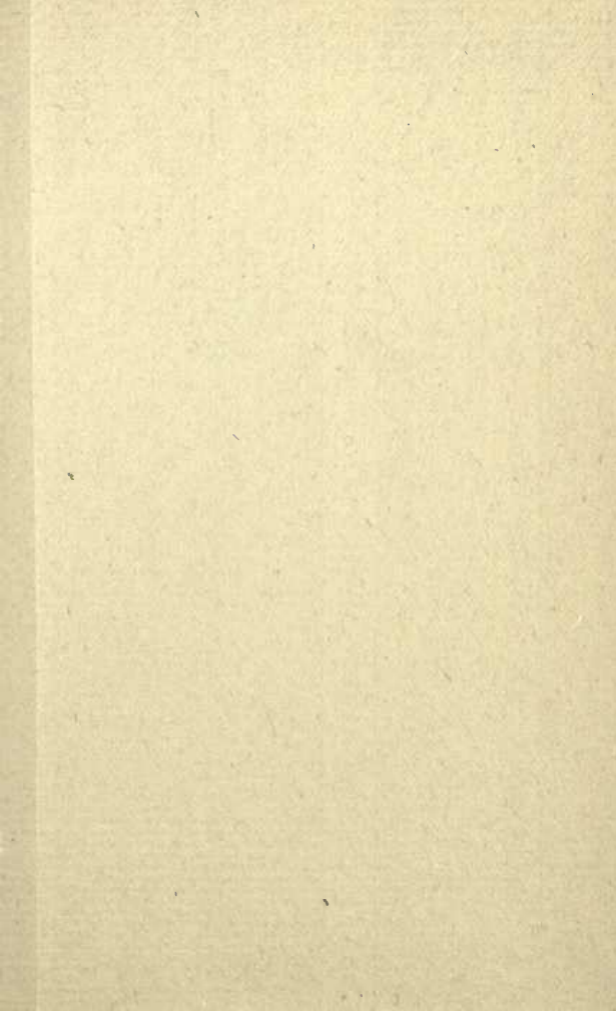
"Will you marry me?" I asked almost with a gasp.

"Yes."

And that was all we said for a long, long time.

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